

140 Twitter Characters To Knowledge Mobilization

KMbeing

The use of Twitter as an effective social media tool for knowledge mobilization is still not understood. This was made clear to me by two things that happened this past week:

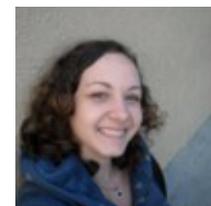
1) I was actively involved in a discussion with several members of **EENet** – the Evidence Exchange Network where the use of Twitter for research dissemination was called into question

AND

2) I performed a brief Twitter survey of the 16 classic **Networks of Centres of Excellence in Canada** (NCE) that focus on research-driven partnerships, and found that these NCEs are still not effectively using this valuable social media tool, despite the Government of Canada's knowledge mobilization mandate for NCEs ***“to transform these discoveries into products, services, and processes that improve the quality of life of Canadians.”***

First, the **EENet Discussion**:

Melissa Taylor-Gates, Social Media and Project Coordinator for the award-winning **MindyourMind** (@mindyourmind_ca on Twitter) was interested in hearing about what other members of EENet are doing **“to engage in meaningful knowledge mobilization”** and how people use social media to achieve this goal. She started the discussion-ball rolling. The conversation soon focused on the use of Twitter as a key social media tool for academic/institutional researchers to engage with a wider and more diverse audience about research being done. **Melissa aptly called Twitter “the great equalizer”** and demonstrated this point with an excellent graphic showing the difference between **equality** and **equity** (which I gratefully co-opted for **one of my blog posts here**), making a further point that **using social media for research dissemination is “more than just making a paper available to everyone online, it’s translating the information into accessible means.”**



Well said Melissa!

These comments sparked valuable discussion – especially around how to sift through the deluge of information to find accurate, evidence-based research findings and trusted sources on Twitter. (For more about sifting through what I refer to as **data/information noise**, **see my previous blog post here**). One member's comment, **“I devoutly hope that no-one would assume that they could get sound clinical research information from a tweet”** and concerns about the limitations of 140 characters caused a flurry of counter-comments. Many EENet members pointed out how to find Twitter sources for relevant and useful research to credible peer-reviewed journals and Twitter profiles using **hashtags** and **hyperlinks**.

Some of the key messages that came out of this discussion are that Twitter is simply a tool – just another medium of sharing information, good or not so good, that can be used properly or not, requiring further learning and skill to effectively use social media for knowledge mobilization. In contrast to **Marshall MacLuhan**, in this case **the medium is not the message – the content is the message**. Yet, it's an important social media tool that is no longer a fad or waste of time. **Twitter is an effective tool for knowledge mobilization**. For my practice as KMbeing, Twitter has successfully created knowledge networking connections with researchers and other stakeholders from Canada, U.S., U.K. and Denmark where we have continued

- **Increasing collaboration between researchers in Canada and abroad**

This is either because – like some EENet members – they're not fully aware of the potential for research outreach and engagement using Twitter, or the NCEs have not identified this as a priority despite the evidence ([presented in a book chapter that I co-authored](#)) of using social media as a means of applying research for public benefit using knowledge mobilization.

For those still uncertain among Canada's NCEs (and other researchers) as to how to best approach and develop a social media strategy using Twitter, here are some tips:

- If your NCE doesn't have one already – create a Twitter account. For nothing else, protect your brand by reserving your naming rights on Twitter.
- Use a simple and descriptive name for your Twitter profile that will clearly identify your affiliation with your NCE and include a brief description of the research focus
- To avoid what is referred to as “shiny object syndrome” – zoom in on pertinent subject matter by using Twitter hashtags which will also establish connections with topics, people and sites that are relevant to your research
- Designate individuals within the NCE whose primary responsibility is for populating, maintaining and monitoring your Twitter account, ensuring they have the time and enthusiasm to consistently tweet and retweet several times throughout each day. This isn't a full time job but needs to be someone's job.
- Don't simply tweet without including links (unless you are engaging in the next bullet point)
- Tweet with a 140 character conversation to connect with other national and international researchers and stakeholders in your discipline to facilitate the *social* in social media by engaging in dialogue and creating opportunities for further engagement online and offline
- Regularly schedule a monthly evaluation of your Twitter account's success and be prepared to realign your Twitter content and approach

Social media is not a fad, and the use of social media for academics and institutions is becoming more incorporated into strategic planning. Many researchers are now recognizing the value of using Twitter in a more consistent and productive manner for knowledge mobilization. Perhaps it's time that some of Canada's NCEs and mental health stakeholders do the same.